

VZCZCXYZ0000
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHSN #0980/01 2332226
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 202226Z AUG 08
FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9955
INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 000980

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/23/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ES](#)

SUBJECT: FMLN CONVENTION: WILL PLEDGED REFORMS AND MODERATE
OVERTONES WIN CENTRIST VOTERS?

Classified By: The Ambassador, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The (left-wing) Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) party presented its government plan for its presidential campaign at its annual convention August 17 in San Salvador. The audience was energized, and grew more so as the convention progressed. Mauricio Funes, FMLN candidate for President, stressed economic, political, and social reform during his address. Funes announced support for economic programs to combat unemployment and inflation, CAFTA and the expansion of free trade agreements, deepening and improving diplomatic relations with the United States, the establishment of diplomatic relations with Cuba and other communist governments, the fight against violence in El Salvador, and the improvement of social programs. Several of these issues represent departures from the FMLN's previous stances. End Summary.

Convention Atmosphere: Electric and Committed

¶2. (C) Poloffs attended the National Convention of the FMLN, where the party presented its party platform. Funes, along with VP candidate Salvador Sanchez Ceren, and Medardo Gonzalez, the party's General Coordinator, all spoke. Some 9,000 FMLN supporters filled the arena, their energy level increasing and peaking during Funes' speech. The FMLN did not announce its candidate list for municipal and legislative elections, as several slots are still in discussion.

Economic and Foreign Policy; Social Program Expansion

¶3. (SBU) All speakers blamed the reigning (center-right, pro-U.S.) ARENA party for all of El Salvador's woes, including economic, criminal, and social problems, and said that party should have been able to demonstrate better results over its 19 years in power. The speakers labeled the ARENA governments as instruments of privilege and corruption.

¶4. (SBU) Funes, Sanchez Ceren, and Gonzalez all focused heavily on the state of the economy during their speeches. All blamed ARENA's economic policies for the high level of unemployment and skyrocketing cost of living, claiming that the current policies only support people of privilege. Funes pledged to confront unemployment by creating new sources of work that will pay a living wage.

¶5. (SBU) Funes noted his support for CAFTA and existing free trade agreements, a departure from the party's prior position. He added that the country should pursue additional free trade agreements with the EU, Japan, China, India, and others in order to spark public and private investment.

¶6. (SBU) The FMLN has long been critical of dollarization, and in previous campaigns, had supported the end of that policy. However, Funes said that his administration would

keep the dollar but, in a gesture to those in the FMLN still opposed to dollarization, would also analyze options for monetary stability.

¶17. (C) The speakers were all in favor of expanding the scope of El Salvador's international relations. Funes said that his government would establish formal foreign relations with communist countries, earning raucous cheers when specifically mentioning Cuba. He also stressed the importance of the country's good relationship with the United States and strongly supported deepening that bond. Sanchez Ceren, an FMLN hardliner, went furthest, giving special welcome to poloffs and pledging the FMLN would strive to further improve relations with the U.S. He spent more time addressing El Salvador-U.S. relations than on any other bilateral relationship.

¶18. (SBU) Funes also discussed the pervasive violence in El Salvador, again blaming ARENA, and specifically ARENA presidential candidate Rodrigo Avila, who twice served as the director of the National Civilian Police (PNC), for the current state of security in the country. He said that the government must not hide from the situation, and must instead confront it directly.

¶19. (SBU) Funes expressed his support for the Salvadoran Armed Forces, but condemned the current government for using them for political purposes, and not for the support of the people. Funes' comments are in the context of a week of media reporting of segments of the FMLN who advocate abolishing the Salvadoran Armed Forces.

¶10. (SBU) Finally, Funes promised improvements in social programs. First, he assured improvements in the health care system, including hospital infrastructure upgrades. Then, he vowed to improve social security, making it available to a greater percentage of the population, including independent workers not covered by current regulations. Then, he cited a plan for a universal basic pension that would be large enough to cover the minimum cost of living. Finally, Funes announced support for equal rights and pay for women.

FMLN Platform Summary

¶11. (SBU) The FMLN platform has four categories: social reform, economic reform, environmental management, and political reform.

¶12. (SBU) Social Reform) The plan calls for a focus on the relationship between social and economic policies, with several specific goals:

- Substantially reduce poverty and increase employment opportunity
- Increase education levels
- Curb cost of living increases
- Eradicate economic, social, and political exclusivity
- Elevate the quality and performance of social investment

¶13. (SBU) Economic Reform) The government plan says that the current economy suffers because it is a system of privilege, in which the major players fail to respect the laws. It supports expanding commercial trade with the U.S. and other markets, stimulating exports, and improving labor rights. It aims to create "the most dynamic economy in Central America" by stimulating domestic production and both public and private investment.

¶14. (SBU) Environmental Management) The plan refers to an environmental crisis on the continent, claiming that irrational use of natural resources, high levels of pollution, and a lack of public policies and education have led to the current substandard state. The platform supports a renewed focus on environmental sustainability, and strives to improve the availability of potable water in the country.

¶15. (SBU) Political Reform) The government platform includes expansion of international relations, further strengthening of El Salvador's relationship with the United States, and the development of democracy. It calls for support of Salvadorans abroad, political decentralization, support for Central American integration, and improved security forces to combat crime while respecting human rights.

¶16. (C) Comment: The FMLN continues to maintain its moderate message in order to attract the centrist voter base that has eluded the party. In several cases, the positions they have outlined, both in their government plan and during their convention speeches, represent departures from the hard-line left-wing stances they have taken in past elections. They repeat many of these mantras privately to USG interlocutors, having mastered the art of speaking consistently from talking points. Embassy will be reporting separately on what we believe life under the FMLN would really look like, talking points notwithstanding. End Comment.
GLAZER